

Study on France and EU Eastward Expansion

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Abstract: The large-scale eastward expansion of the EU has brought great opportunities and challenges to the EU's management. France, as a core country of the EU, is not enthusiastic about the eastward expansion, fearing that it will weaken its influence in the EU, but it voted in favor of the EU's eastward expansion. The reasons behind this include: the eastward expansion of the EU is an inevitable trend, it meets the strategic needs of Germany, and it is timely to partially realize the immediate interests.

Keywords: France; EU eastward expansion; Research.

1. Introduction

The EU's eastward expansion in 2004 was the largest expansion in the EU's history, with a total of 10 Central and Eastern European countries joining the EU at one time, which brought unprecedented opportunities and challenges to its management. France, which has traditionally insisted on "deepening" before "enlarging" the EU [1], had a series of reasons to "sing the opposite tune": from the perspective of "deepening", it has always believed that the decision-making mechanism within the EU needs to be improved. A 25-nation Europe is obviously more difficult to govern than a 15-nation Europe. In 1998, Pierre Moscovici, the French Minister of EU Affairs, Pierre Moscovici said: "The current problem is not to organize the enlargement process. The enlargement process is more or less a *fait accompli*. Thinking about and organizing an enlarged Europe, a 25-nation or even a 30-nation Europe is a risky move" [2]; from the perspective of "enlargement", Central and Eastern European countries are far less attractive to France than southern countries. Until 2013, the French mainstream media still believed that "Paris has always tended to confine Europe to the Carolingian territory" [3]. In contrast, when the Barcelona process launched in 1995 was generally considered to have made limited progress, French President Nicolas Sarkozy proposed the "Mediterranean Union" aimed at strengthening relations with Maghreb countries shortly after he came to power in 2008 [4].

However, Jacques Chirac, then French president, clearly supported the eastward expansion of the EU. In terms of foreign relations, he made official visits to Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary in 1996 and 1997, and once moved forward the timetable for the three countries to join the EU to 1999-2000 [5]. After the Irish referendum rejected the Treaty of Nice in June 2001, France and Germany immediately declared that the timetable for eastward expansion could not be changed [6]. In April 2003, when signing the 10-nation accession agreement in Athens, Greece, he said in a speech: "I have full confidence in the expansion of Europe, because I know that the vitality and talents of all our people united together are enough to meet the challenges [7]." Domestically, he publicly stated that "enlargement is an opportunity for France", and on the eve of the EU's eastward expansion, he tried to eliminate the fear of the people and mobilized the people to participate in the European Parliament elections in June 2004 [8].

Why did the French government, somewhat abnormally,

explicitly support the EU's large-scale eastward expansion in 2004? The author sorted out the views of the political and academic circles and found that there are generally three explanations: geopolitical benefit theory, economic drive theory and cultural integration theory. Former Prime Minister Jean - Pierre Raffarin, who said that the expansion of the EU to 25 countries has created a geopolitical giant, and that European unity is of great historical significance to France. [9] Only by transcending the divided Europe can Europe be rebuilt on a peaceful basis. Former scholar Serge Krebs said that the economic drive theory is like this: "in just a few years, France has gained a new market share in the new member countries, where France had almost no presence before." [10] Former President Chirac said that cultural integration theory is like this: "Europe is first a community of values and principles, and then a community of interests. It is a Europe of people, not a Europe of markets. It is a Europe of freedom and rights." [11]

The author believes that all three viewpoints have certain explanatory power, but they are also easily refuted: Regarding the geopolitical benefit theory-the geopolitical relationship between France and Central and Eastern Europe is not direct, and French politicians are more focused on Europe as a whole rather than the "hexagonal countries" themselves when talking about geography; Regarding the economic drive theory - French companies have successfully occupied a certain share of the Central and Eastern European market, but the economic benefits they have gained are limited, and they have been left behind by Germany (especially in the export of industrial products [12]). Moreover, as an old member state, France also needs to share the corresponding financial burden after the expansion of the European Union; regarding the cultural integration theory-the question of how much commonality there is between Western Europe and Central and Eastern European countries in terms of values and principles is worth discussing. Moreover, 10 years after the eastward expansion, the major French media *Le Figaro* reflected that France did not know as much about Central and Eastern European countries as it did about China and the United States [13] - without enough understanding, how can we talk about cultural integration?

In fact, the above views, especially the first two, seem to have one thing in common - emphasizing that France can benefit from the EU's eastward expansion in 2004, especially in the short-term and direct benefits; but the fact is that France did not benefit much directly from it. Therefore, the author

proposes the following hypothesis - the French government's support for the EU's eastward expansion was not due to its own requirements, but was forced by external forces; the main consideration was long-term and strategic interests. Some of the immediate benefits were realized on the eve of joining the EU, which strengthened the French government's support preference.

2. Comply with the trend of European integration and expansion

From the late 1990s to the early 21st century, European integration and the eastward expansion of the EU have become an inevitable trend: the fall of the Berlin Wall, the end of the Cold War, the disintegration of the Soviet Union and a series of major turning points have reconnected the east and west of the European continent, which were once separated by the Iron Curtain. Both sides have expressed an increasingly strong desire to get closer to each other. On the one hand, the Central and Eastern European countries that have just experienced dramatic changes have long noticed the charm of the EEC/EU in terms of economy, system and social model, and hope to "return to Europe". On the other hand, the old EU member states have also extended an olive branch, holding a summit in Copenhagen in 1993 to declare the conditions for the accession of all Central and Eastern European countries [14]. The 2000 Treaty of Nice has made arrangements for the institutional reform of the EU to accept new member states.

For a time, the "real European dynamic potential" burst out, accompanied by four major engines: the launch of the euro, the signing of the Security and Defense Policy Agreement, the people's movement in Greater Europe, and the public's expectations for Europe [15]. In 2001, *Le Monde* published an article titled "Who Dares to Say No to European Expansion", lamenting that the argument for European eastward expansion was rampant, and no head of state or government dared to admit a dual fact: the old member states were ineffective in reforming the EU system and could not guarantee the acceptance of new member states without damaging the 50-year-old "European House"; the applicant countries could not meet the real requirements for joining the EU [16].

Although *Le Monde* cannot represent the government's views, it does reflect, to a certain extent, the frustration of French society with the EU's expansion trend. Since there is no way to say "no", why not adjust your attitude? In fact, the French government had already begun to "reduce resistance to EU eastward expansion" when it signed the Maastricht Treaty in 1992 and during the Copenhagen Conference in 1993. [17] Leaders realized that France needed a stronger Europe.

A stronger Europe means at least two things to France: one is a peaceful regional environment, and the other is a backer in a multipolar world. The expansion of the EU has brought a peaceful atmosphere to the region, "making it possible for us to coordinate geography and politics, which was completely unimaginable 10 years ago" [18]; "France is happy about the success of the EU expansion, because this move will deeply sow the seeds of peace [19]." The expanded EU has become a world pole, and it will be a possible support for France, a medium-sized power, in dealing with various new challenges in the early 21st century: for example, in 2003, the United States, which promotes unilateralism, was preparing to attack Iraq. France, which advocated a multipolar world, confronted

the superpower together with Germany and voted against it in the UN Security Council. The eastward expansion of the EU has become a general trend. France needs a stronger Europe, and a stronger Europe will give France more confidence.

3. Cooperate with Germany in supporting eastward expansion

Germany is a staunch supporter of the EU's eastward expansion. After the fall of the Berlin Wall, the German government began to assist Central and Eastern European countries through multilateral means (such as the European Community and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe) in order to shoulder historical responsibilities, feeling that "without the free will of our eastern neighbors and friends, we would not be able to achieve our most important national goal - reunification" [20]. Major interest groups in Germany also added fuel to the fire, optimistic about the broad market prospects of Central and Eastern Europe, not to mention that German companies have long existed in Eastern Europe; in 1995, the government announced that German companies' exports to the former Soviet bloc had exceeded exports to the United States [21]. From the 1990s to the early 21st century, from Kohl to Schröder, the German government clearly advocated the eastward expansion of the EU: Chancellor Kohl ran around for it, and Chancellor Schröder said "We are fighting for European unification" [22].

Since Germany is so determined, France will not oppose it for the sake of maintaining the Franco-German axis, even though it has benefited significantly less than Germany from the EU's eastward expansion. The Franco-German axis is not only France's most important bilateral relationship in the region, but also the engine of post-war European integration. France certainly cannot ignore it. There are two reasons:

First, from the 1990s to the early 21st century, Germany's strength rose sharply, while France's influence declined relatively. Instead of fighting alone in dealing with regional affairs and foreign relations, it is better to rely on Germany's strength. After reunification, Germany was full of vitality and became the center of Europe again. It suddenly threw off the burden of being an "abnormal country" and even aroused suspicion from other countries in the European Community. At the same time, France faced many problems: left-right co-governance affected the efficiency of governance, the unemployment rate remained high, and second-generation immigrants caused unrest [23]. The Cold War period of strong France and weak Germany is a thing of the past. Today, the reality of strong Germany and weak France forces French leaders to choose to "bind" with Germany on major issues.

Secondly, with regard to the EU itself, France has always advocated the reform of the EU mechanism, and even suspected of postponing the expansion on this ground [24], while the Franco-German axis is an important support for the reform of the EU mechanism. As far as the contradiction between "deepening" and "enlargement" is concerned, the reform of the EU mechanism corresponding to "deepening" and the admission of 10 new members in 2004 corresponding to "enlargement" are actually two sides of the same coin. Since "enlargement" is an inevitable trend, what France may do is to keep the initiative in "deepening". American scholar Steven Philip Kramer once summarized "France's European view" with three principles:

Intergovernmentalism with minimal damage to sovereignty,

French leadership (or at least "Franco-German leadership" in French terms), Europe for Europeans independent of American influence [25]. Relying on the Franco-German axis to promote the reform of European institutions is at least in line with the last two principles of the "French European View": maintaining Franco-German leadership and not giving the United States room to intervene. No wonder President Chirac said: "To promote European construction, we must first continue to deepen the Franco-German friendship." [26] France's influence is relatively declining, the Franco-German axis must be consolidated, and France is best to cooperate with Germany's support.

4. Realizing some immediate benefits

The Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), an important pillar of EU integration, was established in 1962. It was originally intended to encourage production and address the [27] insufficient self-sufficiency rate (only 85%). However, the good results gradually turned into overcorrection: overproduction occurred in the 1970s and 1980s; the cost of this policy once accounted for the vast majority of the EC budget, seriously squeezing out the development space of common policies in other areas. The Common Agricultural Policy has undergone many adjustments, among which the more recent and important ones are the Mac Sharry reform in 1992, the "Agenda 2000" proposed at the Berlin Conference in 1999, the "Luxembourg Agreement" signed in 2003, and the "more just" reform in 2013. [28] Among these adjustments, the most direct relationship with the EU's eastward expansion in 2004 is the two in 1999 and 2003; during this period, France and Germany reached a key compromise, Chirac fulfilled important interests for the country, and the last obstacle to the eastward expansion negotiations was removed.

At that time, Chirac was mainly concerned about the problems of "direct subsidies" (*aides directes*) and "agricultural expenses" (*dépenses agricoles*): France has always been a net beneficiary of the common agricultural policy. The accession of Central and Eastern Europe, where agriculture accounts for a large proportion of the national economy, will inevitably dilute the "cake" that originally belonged to France. Moreover, the net contributors (led by Germany, including the United Kingdom, Sweden, and the Netherlands) complained that the number of beneficiary member states had increased, making them overwhelmed and hoping to reduce the budget. The reasons given by Germany and the EU were high-sounding, "in order to develop an environmentally friendly and internationally competitive agriculture [29]."

France, however, refused to give in. Specifically, it took two approaches: on the one hand, it worked with Germany and the EU to limit the "direct subsidies" of 10 new member states-starting from the formal accession in 2004, it started at 25% of the old member states, and then increased year by year, and it was not until 2013 that it would be treated the same as the current member states [30]. On the other hand, it forced Germany and the EU to ensure that France's share, which had been finalized at the Berlin Conference in 1999 (it was said that Chirac did not mind losing his diplomatic grace in order to fight for France's rights and interests at the Berlin Summit [31]). In 2002, Chirac made a strong statement in Brussels: if any country wants to renegotiate the common agricultural policy, then other expenses (especially regional subsidies) and "British discounts" should also be listed as topics for discussion. As a result, France and Germany reached an

agreement: respect the "agricultural expenditure" ceiling stipulated in the Berlin Conference that will be extended to 2006 (France accounts for 9.2 billion of the total 45 billion euros for new and old EU member states) [32]; ensure that the budget is sufficient between 2007 and 2013, enter a basic "stable period", and postpone the new round of reforms to after 2013[33]. The EU gave France a break on the Common Agricultural Policy, and the "agriculture maniac" Chirac protected his country's agricultural interests, which were in danger of being damaged, to the greatest extent possible, and ultimately prompted the French government to support eastward expansion.

5. Conclusion

The French government supports the EU's eastward expansion with a very contradictory mentality. On the one hand, France's support for the EU's eastward expansion is to some extent "against its will". It is not out of its own desire, but it is difficult to resist the trend of European integration and must cooperate with Germany's proposition. As Vivien Pertusot, director of the Brussels office of the French Institute for International Studies (IFRI), said, "Since the EU's eastward expansion in 2003 and the accession of 10 Eastern European countries, France has not been able to truly successfully express its position." [34]

On the other hand, the French government at the time also fulfilled its immediate interests to the greatest extent possible-ensuring that France's share of the EU's common agricultural policy was not diluted, and its final supportive attitude can be regarded as based on pragmatic considerations. Although Chirac's uncompromising behavior made Germany and the EU unhappy, it was highly praised at home (especially in the agricultural community): Joseph Daul, an agricultural producer in Strasbourg, France, and then chairman of the European Parliament's Agriculture and Rural Development Committee, believed that "the President of the Republic defended agriculture very beautifully because he knew what agriculture and the food industry meant to France ... At this point, the French are not in a bad position." [35]

Unfortunately, the government's position of supporting European integration was not understood by the people. One year later (May 2005), the French referendum rejected the European Union Constitutional Treaty, which dealt a heavy blow to Chirac. In addition, in the 10 years since the eastward expansion, there has been constant social reflection, especially many voices that feel that the benefits have not been as good as those of Germany. Under external pressure and with a long-term perspective, some countries inevitably make a concession in international affairs. If the immediate interests can be guaranteed to a certain extent, this preference will be strengthened. In this regard, "independent France" is no exception.

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